

# Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants

Bimonthly  
E-News Update

## Field Day Considerations

Farmers Improving Soil Health and Water Quality Throughout Wisconsin's Watersheds

November 2016

**A**s a producer-led group, you may want to host a field day to help demonstrate new practices and technologies you're experimenting with in your watershed. Check out the recaps of these three recent field days for some ideas.

### Ag Innovation Day brings farmers and community together

*Submitted by: Yahara Pride Farms Communications*

On August 16, Yahara Pride Farms (YPF) welcomed more than 100 guests to the annual Ag Innovation Field Day event. New this year, the Ag Innovation Day was open to farmers, agribusinesses and the general public from across the state. In years past, the event was designated exclusively for farmers in the Yahara Watershed, but organizers wanted to expand the reach of the programs and practices that are applicable to a wide audience.

The day kicked off with lunch, followed by several hours of field

### About the program

- Began in Spring 2016
- \$250,000 available each fiscal year
- \$20,000 maximum grant award per group per year



*Compost spreading demonstration at Endres Berryridge Farms during the YPF field day.  
Photo credit: YPF*

demonstrations across four sites. Manure was a central topic of the day and attendees had the chance to see dragline and tanker methods of applying manure using low disturbance manure injection techniques at the first two stops. The third stop included the opportunity to tour the newly built manure composting facility at Endres Berryridge Farms. The group had the chance to learn the science behind the process and the equipment needed to successfully compost manure. Attendees also had the chance to see finished compost applied to a field. The fourth and final stop included a detailed cover crop planting demonstration where attendees had the chance to see eight different pieces of equipment plant a barley-pea mix on a recently harvested wheat field.

After a long, hot day, the group reconvened for dinner and

refreshments. Secretary of Agriculture Ben Brancel delivered the evening keynote and emphasized the importance of farmers learning from farmers. He also noted that there are so many innovative techniques happening in agriculture. Spreading the word through farmer-led conservation and sustainability initiatives is the best way to increase the adoption of the practices highlighted at the field day. Secretary Brancel commended Yahara Pride Farms for their efforts thus far and their future projects.

For more information on the group's efforts, visit [yaharapridefarms.org](http://yaharapridefarms.org).



*YPF field day attendees learn about soil sampling.  
Photo credit: YPF*

# Field Day Considerations *continued*

## Peninsula Pride Farms: Cover Crop Field Day

Peninsula Pride Farms (PPF) hosted its first Cover Crop Field Day on August 26 in Casco. The field day included presentations from Jamie Patton with UW-Extension Shawano County, Joe Johnson with NRCS and Kevin Fermanich with UW-Green Bay. The day focused on the importance of building soil health and featured cover crop test plots, with signs showing the seeding rate and cost of establishment, no-till drill into wheat and soil health evaluation pits.

Attendees included mostly farmers who were able to talk with Jamie Patton about incorporating cover crops and minimal tillage into their farming systems. Patton recommended starting with small changes in management. For example, a moldboard plow farmer could start by no-tilling just a portion of his property to see how soil health improves. She also discussed cover crops and forages that she thinks work best in the Kewaunee area including alfalfa, grasses and wheat. For more recommendations from Jamie, read *Choosing the Right Cover Crop* on page 3.

Kevin Fermanich discussed how increasing soil health through conservation practices helps increase organic matter and reduce erosion and runoff. "We have seen pretty convincing data showing that the soil water-holding capacity increases with no-till activities," Fermanich stated.

The field day was a great opportunity for farmers to share what they had learned from using cover crops with no-till systems



and manure injection. Many of the farmers seemed to walk away from the field day with a new perspective and a willingness to try some of the featured practices. For more information on Peninsula Pride Farms, please visit: [www.peninsulapridefarmsinc.org](http://www.peninsulapridefarmsinc.org)

## Farmers for Lake Country: Field Technology Day

Farmers for Lake Country, a producer-led group working in the Oconomowoc watershed, held their first field day on October 18, 2016 at the Reinders Farm in Concord. The field day included a cover crop test plot on a continuous sweet corn field with 7 different planting scenarios. Cover crop experts including John Simon from Partners in Production and Heidi Johnson, UW-Extension Crop and Soils Agent for Dane County, were there to field questions from event attendees and provide recommendations on the different species of cover crops.

John Koepke, farmer and leader for the producer-led group, stated, "This concept is really about stepping up and doing the right thing. We

*are hoping to inspire producers to experiment and try new things and hopefully adopt these practices into their operations."*

DATCP Deputy Secretary Jeff Lyon gave a keynote presentation over lunch and commended the group for their efforts, "Farmers actually talking to farmers about what is and isn't working for them will lead to increased adoption of conservation practices."

Farmers for Lake Country will be offering a cost-share program in 2017, utilizing their DATCP Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grant. The cost-share program includes funding for first time no-till planting of cash crops or cover crops, first time incorporated fertilizer application utilizing no-till, and establishing cover crops in full season cash crops. Signage will also be available for cost-share participants to recognize farmers for their efforts.

For more information on the cost-share program, contact Don Heilman at (608) 279-2732 or by email: [doncwa33@gmail.com](mailto:doncwa33@gmail.com).

# Choosing the Right Cover Crop

Jamie Patton,  
Agriculture Agent for Shawano County, University of Wisconsin Extension

The interest in cover crops is increasing across the state. While they're not a new practice in our agronomic arsenal, many of you are contemplating how to best incorporate covers into your crop management systems. Like any big decision, my advice is to first ask yourself some questions to help define your next step. Questions like...What is your cover cropping goal? Do you want to reduce erosion? Build soil organic matter? Reduce compaction? Scavenge nutrients? Provide forage? Or a combination of things?

Different goals require different cover crop species or species mixes. Grass species, due to their prolific root systems, are often used for erosion control and to build soil organic matter. Brassicas can have significant fall growth and so, can help with late season erosion control and can additionally provide forage. Legumes are thrown in a mix when we want to add nitrogen to the soil system. In addition to helping us target cover crop species, our cover cropping goals also help us set a bar for what we consider a cover crop "success".

After which cash crop are we going to use cover crops? While there are dozens of cover crop species available, our choices for cover crops species that will be successful are wide open following winter wheat, become fewer after corn silage and narrow to a limited field of species following soybeans and corn grain.

How are you going to seed the cover crop? What equipment do you have available? I think many agree getting the seed in the ground (seed-to-soil

contact) is optimal, particularly in coarser textured soils. Drilling of cover crops is my first choice, but if drilling is not an option, broadcasting with light incorporation can result in good stands in the right situation. Surface broadcast applications without incorporation, by ground or aerial equipment, may work better in moderate to heavy textured soils where the seed has better access to soil moisture, particularly when rain events aren't timely. If seeding cover crops into a standing crop, timing of seeding is key, as young plants will need to access to adequate sunlight to begin photosynthesizing shortly after germination. Talking with crop consultants, agency personnel and Extension agents in your area will help identify successful seeding methods for your operation.

What herbicides have you used in the year (or two) prior to planting the cover crop? This may be one of the most important questions you ask yourself, particularly if you plan on using your cover crop as forage. Herbicide carryover can compromise your cover crop stand and/or make it ineligible for use as feed. Be sure to thoroughly read the herbicide labels and understand any planting or feeding restrictions.

How are you going to terminate the cover crop? For many, selecting species that (usually) winterkill can relieve some of the anxiety of trying covers for the first time. If you would like the cover crop to continue to grow over winter and into the spring, be sure you understand the spring management and termination requirements. Pay particular

attention to the suggested timing of termination in regards to cover crop growth stage and any potential allelopathy effects of the growing covers.

Do you apply manure in the spring and/or fall? If so, consider your options for manure application method and timing. Will you be applying the manure before or after the cover crop is established? With new low disturbance applicators, farmers are successfully knifing manure into standing covers. Others are surface applying manures to standing covers. If applying manure in the fall, selecting cover crop species that will scavenge and hold nutrient over winter is beneficial.

Once you've considered these questions, then selecting cover crop species for your farm becomes a bit easier. You've probably noticed I have avoided giving specific species recommendations, as I am a firm believer in considering all aspects of the system before making a final decision on species.

As a general guide, the Midwest Cover Crops Council has an online selection tool that can help you narrow down species options ([www.mccc.msu.edu](http://www.mccc.msu.edu)). However, to me, talking with your peers and advisors is key to selecting a species or set of species that will work for you. Talk with those who have tried cover crops and been successful or have encountered challenges. As knowledge is often best gained through experience, build upon the experiences of others. But no matter what you do, when trying cover crops for the first time, start with a limited number of acres.

Success breeds success, so start small, determine what is going to work for your farm and build from there!



# Hosting Field Days

Jamie Patton, Agriculture Agent for Shawano County, University of Wisconsin Extension

When planning educational meetings for farmers, nothing strikes fear into people's hearts like the words "field day". Moving a classroom outside takes strong organizational skills and a sense of adventure. I mean, let's be honest, it's really convenient when the tables, chairs, and bathrooms are all wrapped up in a single building... a building with heat, air conditioning, walls and a roof allowing us to ensure our attendees aren't too hot, too cold, being consumed by mosquitos or taking an impromptu shower at the will of the thunderclouds. However, we need to move past this fear, as we all know the benefit of engaging our five senses and being physically active while learning. I am sure Confucius would agree that a well-organized field day helps learners better understand the concepts, as compared to a standard lecture workshop. I know I am being bold in putting words in his mouth, but Confucius was the man who said, "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

So, what makes a great field day? Simply put, good planning from beginning to end, with a lot of room for flexibility. Here are a few key points that always run through my mind when planning a field day. Please realize, these are my ideas, so there is plenty of room for improvement!

**Develop a cohesive program.** I have found my most successful field days are ones where speaker topics mesh around a central topic. While diversity can be good for educational workshops, for field days, where the time allotment is typically only a few hours, I try to choose a single topic. I use three or so presenters to cover various aspects of the topic and to walk attendees through the details of



Jamie Patton discusses the importance of soil health with Peninsula Pride Farms field day attendees.

implementing the topic on their own farms. As adult learners, we value information that is applicable to us. Therefore, attendees appreciate field days where they can walk away and with little effort, apply what they learned to their own businesses.

**Choose dynamic speakers** experienced with presenting outdoors. We have a number of wonderful speakers at our disposal through academia, private industry, governmental agencies, community organizations, and experienced farmers. I try to seek out speakers who are enthusiastic, non-biased, and experienced in presenting without the standard cues, such as PowerPoint. In addition to these qualities, I also look for speakers who encourage attendees to interact with the environment around them (touch, do, observe, measure, etc.). When you think about it, interaction with the environment is the premise of a field day, right? If attendees are not interacting with the soils, crops, animals, or equipment we are showcasing, then what was the point of going to all the work to bring them outside?

If you look deeper into educational theory, many studies have found **farmers prefer to learn from other farmers rather than industry professionals**. Therefore, I also seek out speakers who encourage attendees to engage with each other and to share their experiences with the group, during and after the formal presentation. An organizer can then build upon these interactions by providing time and space for attendees to gather and talk during breaks, lunch and after the meeting.

**Choose an appropriate day of the week and time of the day.** To avoid interference with milking and chores, I typically schedule field days between 10 am and 3 pm or after 7 pm. I try to avoid the week of any major holiday, as well as Mondays and Fridays. As I am new to Wisconsin, I have also learned to avoid the week before and during deer season and any night the Packers or Badgers are playing.

**Advertise, advertise, advertise.** With so much information coming at us each day from newspapers, postal  
*continued on page 5*

# Hosting Field Days *continued*

Jamie Patton, Agriculture Agent for Shawano County, University of Wisconsin Extension

mail, text messaging, social media, magazines, in-person discussions, etc., we often forget advertisements we see only once. Therefore, I advertise my field days through a variety of media and over a several week period. I have found a bright colored postcard in the mail – short, simple and hard to miss – can be very effective, as they're eye-catching, quick to read, and easy to stick to the refrigerator. Although postcards are great, we all know the most effective advertisement is personal contact through phone calls and farm visits.

When designing advertisements, I believe it is good to articulate intentions in case of poor weather up front. Is the field day "rain or shine", should attendees go to an alternative location, will it be postponed to another date, or is there some other plan? If intentions are advertised, attendees won't be guessing as to what to do if they wake up to a thunderstorm. I also provide a contact number on the advertisements, just in case there are questions.

If asking for preregistration, I would encourage you make the information prominent on all advertising, so that it simply can't be read over or ignored. If asking for a registration fee, I include where, how and to whom the fee can be paid. Although some field day organizers don't, I typically allow "walk-ins" the day of the meeting, which can create a challenge when ordering food. When ordering lunch, supplies and seating, all field day organizers have their own "fudge factor" for estimating potential attendees. I typically use 10 percent, meaning I increase the expected number of actual attendees by 10 percent over those registered. I encourage you to talk with field day organizers in

your area to get a good feel for what your potential "fudge factor" should be. Just in case, I typically try to select lunch and break foods that can easily be stretched or supplemented if I need to feed more, or stored for another meeting if fewer people than expected attend.

## **Good directions and signage.**

Because not all attendees may be from the local area, I test my field address to ensure it is recognized by online and in-car navigation software. We've all had the experience of the GPS taking us to the wrong place, even when we have the right address. Therefore, I try to avoid this by pretesting my address and/or providing the actual GPS coordinates for the field. To further define the location, I also provide a small map and simple directions in my advertisements.

On the day of the field day, nothing is more valuable than proper signage. Sign the turns, sign the field entrance, sign the parking area, sign the registration area...sign, sign, sign. The less attendees have to worry about finding the right spot, the happier they will be!

**Be a good host.** Everyone loves a good host and being treated like royalty. I try to imagine everything a person might reasonably want at a field day and provide it: chairs, tents, port-a-potties, warm or cool drinks, snacks, garbage cans, stapled handouts (something less likely to blow away), a hard surface to write on (such as a folder), a pen, agenda with contact information of presenters, microphones for speakers, ways to wash hands (if attendees are going to get dirty/eat lunch), first aid kit, etc. Basically, if it is going to be hot or cold, plan for shelter. If there is going to be a lot of walking, think about a wagon. If touring a livestock farm, provide

disposable biosecurity boots. Being a good host goes a long way in making a good field day even better!

**Communicate effectively.** It may seem obvious, but I try to welcome everyone to the field day and introduce myself, the farmer, my sponsors and my speakers. Also, I like to provide a basic synopsis of what we are going to cover and when, as well as any directions for more complicated tasks –moving to another area for lunch, boarding a bus for a tour, etc. At the end of the day, I like to bring the group back together to summarize the key points of the day, ask for questions and thank everyone for coming.

These are just a few of the basics I try to think through when organizing a field day. By no means is this an exhaustive or definitive list. My simple goal was to get you thinking through the organization process of hosting your own outdoor educational event.

As we all know, you have to see soil in the pit, crops in the field, equipment in action, and conservation practices doing their job in order to develop a better understanding of this complex world we call farming! There's no better day than learning in the field...and no matter what you've heard, I have never seen anyone melt in the rain!





# Trout Creek-Mill Creek Farmer Led Watershed Group

Collaborator: Michael Fields Agricultural Institute

Iowa County's Trout Creek-Mill Creek Farmer Led Watershed Group is working on improvements in soil erosion, groundwater quality, animal waste management and nutrient management in order to reduce the risk of nutrient runoff from the region's highly erodible land. The group is comprised of ten farms so far, implementing practices such as contour strip cropping, conservation tillage, grassed waterways, rotational grazing and developing and following a nutrient management plan.

The producer-led group is working in partnership with the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute (MFAI) on outreach and research efforts including hosting field days, educational farm tours and on-farm cover crop demonstration trials. "We are very excited to continue our collaboration with the Iowa County farmers who are demonstrating such deep commitment to conservation and protecting the water quality and soil resources in the region," stated Margaret Krome, MFAI Policy Director.

The group is also working closely with the Iowa County Land Conservation Department, NRCS and Extension staff to leverage resources and accomplish



watershed goals.

## Accomplishments so far:

- All farmers in the project have and use a nutrient management plan
- Increased cover crop use by 232 acres in the watershed
- Protected streams against livestock destabilization through stream fencing, stream crossings and stream buffer installation
- Held five meetings to create a work plan, goals and group structure as well as to discuss stream

buffers, NRCS and county cost-share programs and water quality monitoring

- Held a farm tour to celebrate Wisconsin conservation farming with Gulf fisherman.



## PLWPG Requirements

- Groups must be led by at least 5 eligible producers
- Groups must partner and form a MOU with either DATCP, DNR, County, UW-Extension or nonprofit conservation org.
- Groups must provide 50% matching funds to their grant request
- Groups must assist other agricultural producers in a watershed to voluntarily conduct water quality improvement efforts

For additional eligibility criteria, please view the Request for Proposals on DATCP's [Producer-Led webpage](#).



# Trout Creek-Mill Creek Farmer Led Watershed Group *continued*

Collaborator: Michael Fields Agricultural Institute



## Farm Tour and Seafood Recap

On September 23, Iowa County's Trout Creek-Mill Creek Farmer Led Watershed Group held a farm tour with a twist that focused on conservation at three farms in the producer-led group as well as on stories from Gulf of Mexico fishermen. Since the waters of the region flow directly into the Wisconsin River and then to the Mississippi River, the group invited Bayou fishermen to share why Wisconsin farmers' conservation practices matter to them and their families. In turn, the fishermen brought a wonderful seafood meal for farm tour attendees to enjoy. Tours were hosted by Michael Dolan, the farmer leader of the producer-led group and manager of Seven Seeds Farms who discussed alley-cropping, cover crops, rotational grazing and agroforestry; the Stapleton farm where the owner discussed the benefits of no-till; and the Cates farm, where owners discussed rotational grazing, stream crossings and general land management.



## Trout Creek-Mill Creek Farmer Led Watershed Group *Project Goals*

- To reduce nutrient contamination of water, especially by phosphorus and nitrogen, and reduce soil loss from their farms
- For all farms in the group to develop and implement a nutrient management plan
- To increase the use of no-till drilling for planting across all farms, on a minimum of 700 acres in 2017
- To educate the group on important aspects of resource management in the watershed, holding at least six meetings in 2017
- To increase group membership by at least five more farmers and five non-farming landowners, with diverse profiles regarding size, farm type, and farming philosophy
- To hold at least one field day and one farm tour covering at least three farms
- To have 50 participants attend each of their field day/farm tour events, including at least 20 farmers from within the watershed
- To engage additional NGOs and for-profit interests in the area in the project



# Annual Producer-Led Watershed Protection Grants Workshop

For producer-led groups and collaborators

December 14, 2016

The Wilderness, Wisconsin Dells

Registration required. For more information, visit the [Producer-Led webpage](#).

## Nutrient Management Farmer Education (NMFE) Grants

Interested in hosting a nutrient management training?

DATCP awards grants for organizations to perform nutrient management training and assist producers with nutrient management plan development and implementation through the NMFE grant program. Producer-led groups that are interested in incorporating nutrient management into their projects are encouraged to apply to this program.

For more information on this funding, [visit the NMFE webpage](#).

### For more information:

[Visit our Producer-Led webpage](#)

### Questions?

Contact:

608-224-4622

[Rachel.Rushmann@wi.gov](mailto:Rachel.Rushmann@wi.gov)

